

Visit Hill Park. Part II

The old wooden city was situated on elevated ground – on Table Hill, Bekešas Hill and Three Crosses Hill. For a long time, some scholars questioned the location of the wooden Curved Castle. It was thought that the castle might have stood in the vicinity of Bokšto Street, Bernardine Garden or Castle Hill. In 2008–2011, archaeologists discovered numerous remains of defensive walls and wooden buildings in Hill Park. It was established that the first settlements had already been developing here since the Stone Age, while in the 11th–14th centuries the first wooden city of Vilnius, known as the Curved City or Curved Castle, stood here. The fortifications of the Curved City protected the approaches to the Upper and Lower Castles, as the new channel of the Vilnia River had not yet been excavated at that time. The Curved City had at least two lines of fortifications. The wooden city and castle were burned down in 1390 during Vytautas' campaign against Jogaila, when Vytautas had enlisted the forces of the Teutonic Order. The burned city was never rebuilt on this site. In the 14th century, the construction of stone defensive structures began, the foot of Gediminas Hill became a relatively safe and much more promising place to live, and the city expanded southwards from the Lower Castle.



Connections with the Wooden Settlement of Kernavė: The wooden settlement of Kernavė was also burned down during the same campaign of 1390. However, unlike Vilnius, considerably more remains and archaeological finds from the old city survived in Kernavė due to favourable circumstances. The rich archaeological finds from Kernavė allow us to better imagine the wooden city of Vilnius. These cities belonged to the same period and had much in common. Both are associated with the beginnings of the formation of the Lithuanian state during the reign of Mindaugas. In the 13th–14th centuries, in terms of the size, importance and strength of its defensive fortifications, only Vilnius could have rivalled Kernavė. <https://www.kernave.org/archeologine-vietove/>

Song Festival Grounds: Let us look at this valley from above. Research has established that one of the streets of the old wooden city led towards the Neris through the territory of the present-day Song Festival Grounds. During the Soviet period, it was decided to adapt Hill Park for recreation and entertainment. In 1955, when the Song Festival stage and amphitheatre were built, the cultural layer that may have existed in this valley was ultimately destroyed. Major cultural events, including the Lithuanian Song Festivals, are still held here.

Table Hill: The hill has been known by this name only since the middle of the 20th century, when its surface was artificially levelled during the construction of the Song Festival stage. Until 1997, when Hill Park was declared the Vilnius Castles State Cultural Reserve, various events of the capital were held here. Research conducted in 2008–2011 established that before the construction of the Imperial Russian fortress, the hill was 2–4.5 metres higher.



The Imperial Russian Fortress of Vilnius: In 1831, when the first Lithuanian and Polish uprising against the Russian Empire began, Tsar Nicholas ordered the construction of a fortress in Vilnius. The system of defensive structures covered the territory of Castle (Gediminas) Hill, Three Crosses Hill and the right bank of the Neris opposite Castle Hill. Four-metre-high earthworks were constructed and deep, wide defensive ditches measuring 2.5×4.5 metres were dug. This severely disrupted the old terrain and the archaeological cultural layers that had accumulated there. Barracks were built near present-day Kosciuškos Street, where a branch of the National Museum – the former prison – is now located. From there, fortifications extended uphill towards Three Crosses Hill, enclosing the entire summit of the hill. A heated wooden blockhouse was built on Three Crosses Hill. Remains of the Imperial Russian fortifications were discovered here during archaeological research.